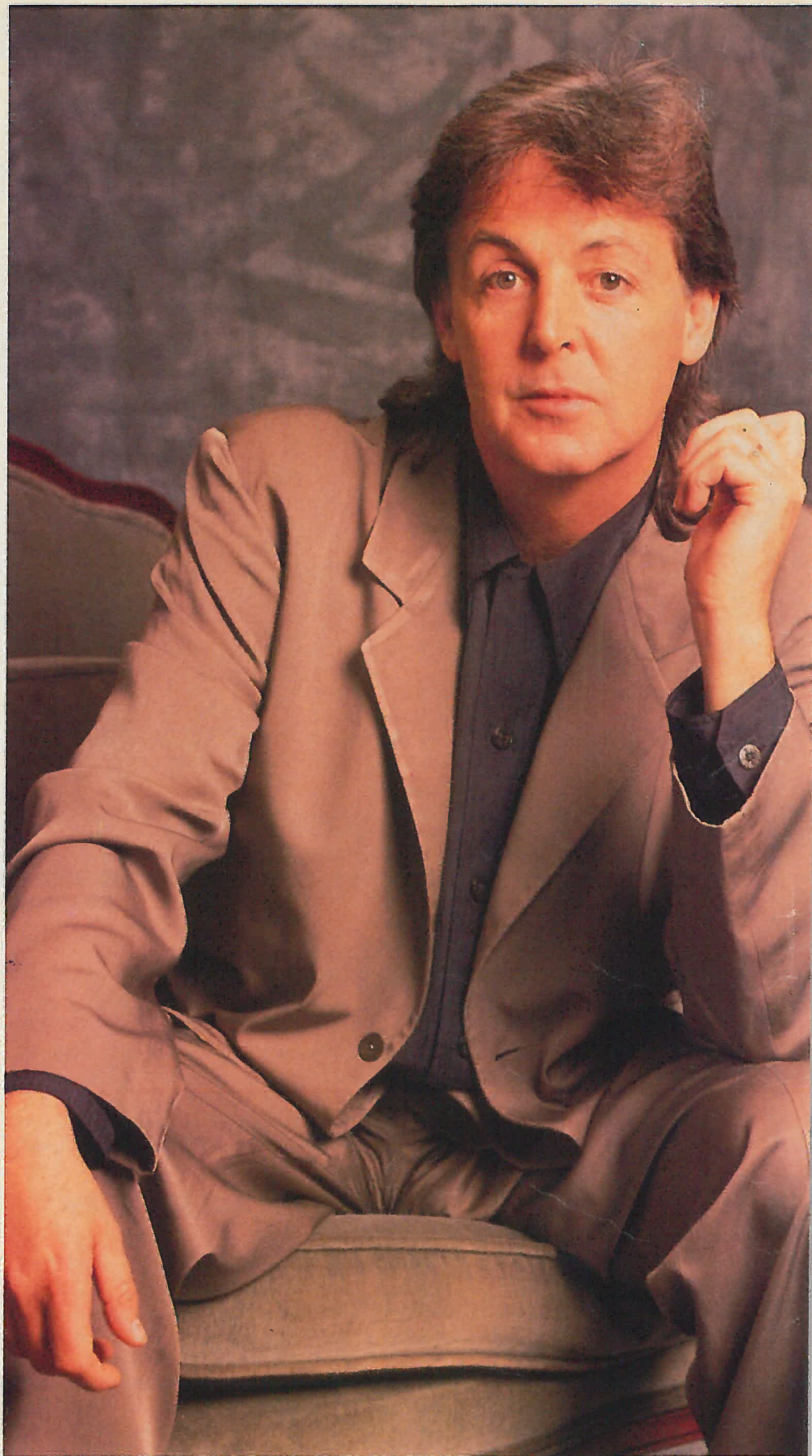


Paul McCartney hardly needs introduction. As a member of one of the greatest and most influential rock 'n' roll groups of all time, the Beatles, he wrote and co-wrote countless classic songs, recorded numerous brilliant albums, and made an INDELIBLE mark in history as a legend in his own time. As a solo artist since the Beatles' breakup in 1970, McCartney has continued carving new musical paths, working with the group Wings as well as a number of notable artists (Michael Jackson and Elvis Costello, among others).

But Paul's latest project—an ORATORIO—may be his biggest musical leap of all. His first full-length classical work, *Paul McCartney's Liverpool Oratorio* came about when the star was commissioned to write music in honor of the 150th anniversary of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society. (Liverpool, a large city in England, is McCartney's hometown.) The eight-movement oratorio, which is loosely autobiographical, was written with conductor/composer Carl Davis and had its world premiere last June at Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral. More recently, the *Oratorio* had its North American premiere at New York City's Carnegie Hall.

MUSIC ALIVE recently had the honor of talking to McCartney about the *Oratorio*. Here's what he had to say.



Bill Bernstein/Outline

When you were approached by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society to write music for their anniversary, what were your first thoughts?

I've been flirting with classical music for some years, on and off. I guess the arrangements for "Yesterday" and "Eleanor Rigby" were the most obvious flirtations. So when the approach came, I liked the idea of the challenge of attempting a full-blown work. I must admit that when the idea first came about, and an oratorio was suggested, I didn't know what an oratorio was. I only found that out by accident, when I was on a flight and I read an article about oratorios in the in-flight magazine. I think something like this had long been at the back of my mind—but the right opportunity had never been there before. Because of the Liverpool connection, that provided that opportunity. For me, it was a way of giving something back to Liverpool. I like to do that, if I can.

Once you'd accepted the commission, did you try to learn more about classical music?

Not really. I was collaborating with Carl Davis on *The Liverpool Oratorio*, and Carl is classically trained. He's got this whole bank of classical knowledge that I haven't. But it seemed to me that that was an advantage, because I wasn't always going about it wondering, "Is that Delius? Does this sound like Wagner?" when I was writing the *Oratorio*. I didn't want to have the problem of wondering whether I'd heard something before. I take a more PRIMITIVE approach to music. It's a bit like the earliest cave art. The cave artists didn't have any training, but their work is still considered to be good art.

Prior to doing the *Oratorio*, how much had you actually listened to classical music? Had you heard it as a young boy growing up in Liverpool?

When I was growing up, we never had classical music played in our house. My father hated it. He liked jazz, my dad, and if any classical music ever came on the radio he would switch the dial or turn it off, so I never really heard any. Obviously over the years I've heard classical pieces, but it wasn't something that I went out and studied. I was always much more interested in rock 'n' roll—Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Buddy Holly—and I thought the songs those guys did were classics.

Speaking of your early years in Liverpool, is it true that at age 11 you didn't pass the audition to become a member of the Liverpool Cathedral Boys' Choir?

It's absolutely true. It was Coronation Year in Britain, and I had just started classes at the Liverpool Institute, my grammar school. It was a big prestige thing to be one of the Cathedral Choristers—the Cathedral is just across the road from my old school—and I went along and auditioned. The problem was that you had to be able to sight-read music and I couldn't—I still can't—and so I flunked the audition.

When we did the *Oratorio* all these years later, rehearsing the choirboys to sing my stuff, I joked that this was me getting my revenge for getting turned down for the choir as a kid.

How did you decide to use your growing-up years as a basis for the storyline for the *Oratorio*?

That sort of just happened once Carl (Davis) and I sat down to write it. I started relaying memories and experi-

McCARTNEY

scores with

Liverpool

Oratorio

BY CATHY CASSINOS-CARR

ences and he started getting all excited about it. The first movement, "War," is about a child being born during the last world war [World War II]. That was me, born into a Liverpool at war. My father was a volunteer fireman at the time and he would take my mother down into their little air-raid shelter to huddle up against the blasts of the Luftwaffe [the German Air Force] air raids. So we worked that into the storyline.

I also wrote in some of my memories of school—like sagging off [skipping] class, as we call it, to run across the road and sunbathe on the gravestones in the Cathedral graveyard. The Miss Inkley figure in the second movement, the teacher who taught the boys Spanish, was based on one of my teachers.

But I didn't want the *Oratorio* to be all my story. I didn't want to cover the Beatles story again because that is a well-trodden path and, besides, I wanted the *Oratorio* to be not just about my life but about a Liverpool life and follow the kinds of hopes and joys and crises that could happen to anyone.

What was it like to return to Liverpool and relive your memories?

When we were rehearsing the *Oratorio*, that brought back a lot of memories. We rehearsed it in the Philharmonic Hall, and when I went back there for that, it was the first time I'd stepped back in that building since I was at school.

We used to have our school speech days in the Philharmonic Hall, and going back there brought back memories of those speech days, with my parents sitting up in the balcony—immensely proud of their SWOTTY kids appearing to understand the Latin of the school motto, "Non nobis solum sed toti mundo nati," which translates as, "Not for ourselves, but for the whole world were we born." I think there's a wisdom in that motto and it applies

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There appears to be a lesson here with the *Oratorio* about taking risks, accepting challenges, and not worrying about what the others say.

I think if you're a composer and you're forever worrying about what the others will say, you're never going to compose anything. When I write something I don't go into it thinking "I hope so-and-so will like this." Rather I tend to write to please myself. I want to ensure that I'm happy with it.

I suppose the *Oratorio* was a bit of a risk, a challenge, but then I never wanted to be writing the one sort of music all my life. When I was about 20, around the time that I wrote "Yesterday," I had this image of myself at 30 doing this sort of thing—the *Oratorio*—in a tweed jacket with leather patches on the elbows. Back then I was thinking, "Well, I can't go on doing rock 'n' roll when I'm 30," but that hasn't happened until now, when I'm almost 50. But I'd like to do more of this now—I'd like to write something in the classical vein. I like the idea of not always having to perform what I write. The great thing about the *Oratorio* is that I don't have to perform it; I can come and just hear it when I'm 90.

Do you have any advice for the readers of this magazine who are

longing for a professional career in music?

Yeah—play. Play and play and play. There really is no substitute for it. If you want to make it in rock 'n' roll, then you've just got to get out there and do the live gigs.

It doesn't matter whether you're playing at the school prom or in some coffee bar; just practice your performing. I think it pays off eventually; not only does it make you a better musician, but it is also more fun. I mean, that's part of the reason why you want to play music in the first place, that thrill of performing to an audience.

I certainly think that is the reason why bands like the Stones, the Grateful Dead, the Who and me are still around today. It's because years ago we put in all those hours gigging. It makes a difference. The reason why a lot of the bands that grew out of the '60s are still popular in the '90s is because they are good live acts; they know how to play.

I know there's been a tendency for certain artists of recent years to have grown out of the recording studio rather than the road, and while it's all very well to have drum machines and all that, it makes it much more difficult for those artists when they have to perform to a live audience. Also, I

think that performing helps your songwriting as well, so if you're lucky enough for some record producer to pick you up and ask if you've got any songs, you've got a whole repertoire to run through, which will make you much more attractive to a record company.

Any suggestions for those who'd like to try songwriting?

Just try it. And keep trying it. And keep on keeping on. If you've got it in you, the effort will bring it out. Write about what you know about and, as I said before, write for yourself.

Do you expect to write anything in the classical vein again?

I'd like to. I don't know what yet. Maybe a string quartet or something classical for the guitar.

I've been working on a new studio album with Linda and the band, and that will be the next big project. I'd like to tour that album when it's done, and get back out on the road again. I think you'll see me back out there before too long.

Listen To . . .

...an excerpt from Paul McCartney's *Liverpool Oratorio*, courtesy Angel Records/EMI Classics. This is part of Movement 1, called "War." It features the Liverpool Cathedral Choristers.

MILES DAVIS

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audiences enjoyed by such groups as the Rolling Stones and the Grateful Dead. And of course, being Miles, he had also grown tired of the music he was playing and longed to try something fresh.

As he started adding electronic keyboards and guitar to his groups, Miles also abandoned traditional jazz melodies and chords. Instead, on albums like *In a Silent Way* and *Bitches Brew*, eerie smoke-swirls of spacey harmony floated over repeated rock bass lines until the piece suddenly ended for no apparent reason. At age 43, Miles had again created something very new and "with it," and...*Bitches Brew* was a best-seller!

From the "space rock" of 1970, he branched out into funk and con-

tinued to explore fusion, always reshaping contemporary sounds in his own image.

HEALTH PROBLEMS

In 1975, health problems—including ulcers, pneumonia and *BURSITIS*—forced Miles into temporary retirement. When he returned in 1981, he began exploring a more "studio" approach to making records. Although he made a few more albums and public appearances, Miles' health continued to deteriorate. By the time he performed at New York's JVC Jazz Festival in August 1991, it was clear that all he could do was just pick up his horn and play a few notes. He checked into a California hospital in early September. His doctor said that the causes of his death were pneumonia, respiratory

failure, and a stroke.

It's kind of hard for any jazz-lover to believe that Miles is gone. Then again, it's hard to believe that he did as much as he did in only one life!

Miles Davis will probably be remembered more for his work in the 1950s and 1960s than his earlier or later music. But he'll also be remembered for the way he wouldn't just sit down and "be old," wouldn't stop looking around for new things to do, and, oh, yes...for the way he "changed music five or six times," as he once put it.

Alan Rosenthal is a jazz musician who contributes to MUSIC ALIVE.

Listen To . . .

...Miles Davis' performance of "In Your Own Sweet Way," courtesy Fantasy Inc. Enjoy!